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Peace is not enough for Angolans

By Lara Pawson

BBC News, Luanda

Killa Soldier is not, as it may sound, a nom de guerre.

Killa is a young rap singer who, unlike many Angolan men, never fought in his country's 27-year civil war which ended exactly five years ago.

On stage, he lumbers about in baggy jeans, microphone glued firmly to his lips, his right hand jolting rhythmically towards the crowd.

Front man for Angolan rap group, Buéd Flow, Killa boasts a large fake diamond in one earlobe, and a baseball cap pulled down firmly over his young fresh face.

But off stage he is softly spoken and seems to suit his real name, Milton Domingo Capitao, better than Killa.

That's not to say he - nor fellow band mates Cabras (Gelson Maneco) and Baia-G (Magalhaes da Costa) - shouldn't be taken seriously.

When it comes to talking about five years of peace in Angola, they are extremely serious.

"They say we live in a rich country, but the people don't see any of that wealth," says Killa.

"There are large parts of this city which look as if they are part of another world. They are such a mess. This country is full of people who don't have a fatherland, because this government does not look after them."

Cabras and Baia-G nod in agreement, and then the three young rappers run through a list of problems they believe their government is failing to address: illnesses like cholera and malaria, a failed education system, a poor health service, bad governance, corruption and an international community which - the band say - is only interested in fuel.

"We don't blame the international community," says Killa.

"The people who should be blamed are those who open the gates and let them in. The foreigners come here to exploit our riches and they are helped by the barons of this country."

'Shooting has stopped'

When asked if they'll be celebrating today, Buéd Flow seem a little irritated. In their opinion, five years of peace has done little for the majority of Angolans.

"The shooting has stopped," says Cabras, "and that's good of course. But it's not nearly enough. We don't have much to celebrate."

Nevertheless, a great deal has changed since the death in February 2002 of Jonas Malheiro Savimbi, the leader of the former Unita rebel group, which led to an almost immediate end in hostilities.

Angola has become the first African country to turn its back on offers of assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Finance Minister Jose Pedro de Morais told journalists the economy had grown in real terms at an average of 13% during the last three years, and said of the IMF, "We do not need their money."

The oil-rich country has also paid off at least two-thirds of its \$2.3bn (£1.16bn) debt to the Paris Club, and this year alone expects to produce 585m barrels of oil, worth over \$30bn (£15bn), which is more than the entire Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development aid to the whole of Africa in 2006.

Optimistic

There are clear signs of economic development in and around the capital city, Luanda.

Large condominiums - high-quality, gated housing for locals and foreigners - have sprung up; last month the country's first indoor shopping centre, Belas Shopping, was opened, an investment of \$35m (£17.7m); a Hugo Boss store for men's clothes has opened in the heart of Luanda; and building projects are visible all over the capital, where the value of land has shot up during the last five years.

Portuguese businessman, Joao Carvalho, manages a new delicatessen Gourmet de Belas, in the Belas Shopping mall.

He sells wines from all over the world - which he admits are going for twice the price they would in Europe due to import tax - He also stocks quality cheeses, foie gras, meats and expensive Belgian chocolates.

He is optimistic about Angola's future because of new developments like the mall.

"This shopping centre marks a new epoch for Angola. It's going to place Angola above other societies. It creates work and it's going to raise the level of society here. This is what Angola needs - more industries, more constructions like this."

'Common destiny to build'

Benício Ofemi is 19 years old. At the age of three he contracted polio, and today he begs for money from his wheelchair in the centre of the capital. Asked if life is improving for him, he has mixed views.

"Life? Is it improving? No, it's not," he says firmly, before stopping to reconsider.

"In some ways it's not as bad as it was - we don't have to flee fighting at night, we don't have to kill each other - but it's getting more expensive. One 20 litre container of water costs over half a dollar. In our house we can only afford four containers of water a day between the six of us."

There are some observers here who are concerned about the lack of socio-economic improvements taking place for the bulk of Angolan people who are struggling to keep up with the booming oil economy.

"I am afraid that for the next 10 years, we will not notice an improvement. I'm very concerned about that."

But speaking in Luanda at the National Assembly at the opening of a national debate entitled The National Agenda of Consensus - an initiative of the MPLA ruling party - President José Eduardo dos Santos said: "The country is in peace. The moments of uncertainty and a deep lack of confidence among people are in the past. Hope, self-esteem and confidence are reappearing.

"We have, finally, a common destiny to build, with national interests and strategies to preserve and to develop... The Angolan people are going to continue strengthening their unity around the same objectives, principles and common values in building a democratic and prosperous country which we all long for..."

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